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## Book Review

# Our Time Has Come: How India is Making Its Place in the World

Alyssa Ayres

Oxford University Press, New York, NY; 2018, 360 Pages  
\$27.95, ISBN-13: 978-0190494520

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In the past two decades, discussions of India's global emergence and of its rightful place in the world have occurred both within and beyond India. Notable authors, statesmen, and critics have published volumes on India's arrival on the world stage and the nation's goals of peace and prominence. These volumes include *Pax Indica* by Shashi Tharoor, *Crossing the Rubicon* by C. Raja Mohan, *Emerging India* by Stephen Cohen and *Why India is Not a Great Power (Yet)* by Bharat Karnad, among others. In the new book, *Our Time Has Come: How India is Making its Place in the World*, former U.S. Deputy Assistant Secretary for South Asia during Barack Obama's administration, Alyssa Ayres, argues that "A firm consensus does not yet exist about whether India is a global power. But it is getting there."

Taking cues from Manmohan Singh and Narendra Modi, Indian prime ministers who have previously asserted that India's time has come to regain its due place in the comity of nations, Alyssa Ayres studies relevant indicators to analyze the "process as Indian citizens make their country's place in the world." Through this analysis, she argues that "India is not yet singularly vital to the rest of the world ... but India's rise to become a major power as already underway...." She concludes by addressing American leaders, writing that "Washington's moment of choice in South Asia has nearly arrived," that "India should be better understood and better appreciated in its own terms."

Through the lens of American national interests, the book discusses India's emergence on the world stage as a "historic turning point" that is the "defining story of our era." Arguing from an Indian perspective, the book makes the case that the lopsided global management of power has stood in the way of recognition of India's accomplishments, despite its mammoth size, democracy, and accomplishments.

Ayres observes two systemic trends that have perpetuated the understanding of India's standing in the world. First, despite India's emergence in recent years as one of the world's ten most powerful economies, its "self-perception as a developing country remains ineradicable .... Indian leaders continue to project India's 'developing country' face in global forums. Therefore, domestic economic decisions often conflict with India's international ambitions." Second, India often seeks to "remain aloof" of world entanglements and intends to fly "below the radar," when the world is expecting the country to shoulder

more global responsibilities, not the “ambivalence with which Indians envision their country’s role” on the global stage. Ayres asserts that Indians are “paradoxical” regarding their country’s role as a global leader.

However, Ayres’ own experience leads her to consider contemporary India as “a vastly different place” than how popular perceptions understand it, noting that India “interacts with the world in very different ways; in fact, the long road from Prime Minister Nehru’s ‘socialistic pattern of society’ to Modi’s ‘business runs in my blood’ mentality captures the magnitude of change India has undergone.” India is gradually gaining not only in terms of global power but also in global visibility. In the meantime, the nation’s approach to global diplomacy is changing, and domestic political factions see a special role for India at the global stage by virtue of its size, civilizational accomplishments, and achievements of democracy. Ayres argues that India’s continued economic growth and smooth mending of internal cleavages will help “India to determine global outcomes on its own” in the decades ahead; in the pursuit, a “tough road still lies ahead,” as India’s vulnerabilities are likely to persist for the foreseeable future.

Ayres rightly observes that India is “not seeking to overturn the global liberal order,” even if many categorize New Delhi as a so-called *revisionist power*; rather, India seeks greater representation in institutions of global governance in order to gain a louder voice and a heightened global status, which it has been denied in the past. Ayres notes that India’s ambition as a global power “remains a work in progress.” She argues that the “Modi government has begun a process of changing how India presents itself and relates to the world, with a focus on transitioning from a ‘balancing power’ to a ‘leading power’ but that will take time.” In a move toward its expanding sense of global responsibilities, India has, in recent years, demonstrated its willingness to serve as a “net provider of regional security,” especially in the Indian Ocean region.

Regarding India as a “cautious actor on the world stage,” Ayres highlights how New Delhi shies away from pressing other countries regarding their own internal issues—including democracy. She writes that “even as India joins the front ranks of global powers it will retain some of its habitual caution, except when it feels that its core interests are at stake.” India’s repeated abstentions from votes in the UN General Assembly “illustrate the higher propensity to avoid taking a stand than is the case for many other countries.” Ayres is rather precise in her observation of India’s conduct at the global level, but seems to have overlooked India’s highhandedness in the immediate neighborhood, where New Delhi has decisively intervened several times, both politically and militarily.

India is undeniably transitioning to become a global power. But how much time will it take, and what type of power will it become? Given India’s actions in the past few decades, it seems India will follow traditional paths to global status, namely: enhancing global presence, achieving economic and technological prowess, and building alternative institutions of global governance. If its economy continues to register uninterrupted, double-digit growth for several decades, India would become a *traditional superpower*, such as the U.S. or Russia. But an important question remains unanswered: what unique qualitative changes can India bring to global governance?

Toward the close of *Our Time Has Come*, Ayres devotes a great deal of space to the question of “How the United States Should Work with a Rising India” (Chapter 8). Both countries have come a long way in overcoming “chronic estrangement” to form what is, today, “a greater convergence ... on broad geopolitical and economic ideals.” The Indo-U.S. nuclear deal, India-specific NSG waiver, high-technology cooperation, India’s support for the U.S.-led Global War on Terror, joint military exercises, joint strategic vision statement regarding the Indian Ocean, and the Asia-Pacific (2015), etc. mark noticeable realignments of the two countries’ strategic goals. Still, the U.S. and India, as described by the American professor and former diplomat R. Nicholas Burns, will not become formal treaty allies; they will ‘align’ on many issues, but they will not be ‘aligned’.

Despite India's aversion to any formal alliance with the U.S., Ayres argues that "the U.S. will still benefit strategically from a closer relationship with a strong democratic Asian Power," suggesting that "Americans do not yet put India on the front burner when they think about foreign policy." America still seems confused about where to place India in its scheme of global order. Ayres asserts that it is time for the U.S. to seriously take into account India's own sensitivities regarding bilateral relations and its dealings with Pakistan. Ayres believes that "Americans have done little to gain serious familiarity with India" in these respects.

Finally, Ayres argues that at this decisive moment, the U.S. must "bring India into economic organizations like APEC, the OECD and IEA, etc. and treat India as a 'joint venture partner, not an ally-in-waiting'" by building habits of cooperation. India's candidature for UNSC and strategic cooperation with New Delhi in the wider Asia Pacific must be advanced. That is the strategic goal on which the U.S. should focus. Stronger bilateral trade ties should be nurtured, including technical partnerships on democracy, more funding for India studies, etc.

Ayres asserts that if America is flying blind with respect to Russia, it "must be blind, deaf, and mute on India." Therefore, Ayres's book goes beyond the conventional American narrative of bilateral relationships and is a must-read for decision-makers, academics, and those with interests in global order and Indo-U.S. strategic discourse.